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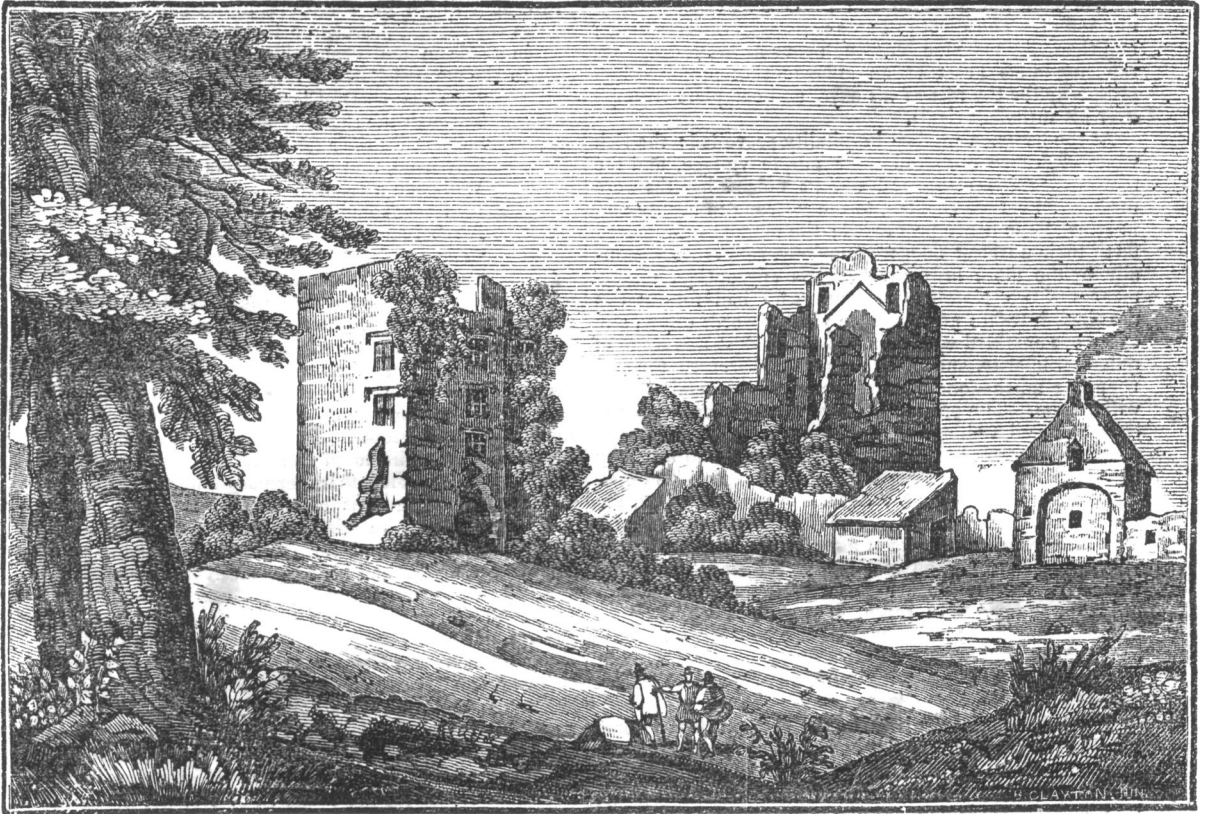
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safeguards against its attacks. This extraordinary woman, from her great powers of mind, had no small share in influencing the most remarkable events of these days; but, as her history, from its including so great a length of time, and involving so many interesting occurrences connected with the affairs of Ireland, would far exceed our allotted space, we must only postpone it to some future occasion. There is yet shown by the neighbouring peasantry what they term the "chair" of "Peg Garret," or "Maighrid ni Gearodh," as they severally term this lady, who, according to them, had taken a principal part in the build-

ing of Balleen. In 1600, Thomas Earl of Ormonde took this Castle, with those of Athnaorlar and Mountgarret, from the Lord Viscount Mountgarret, then in rebellion. It also suffered much from Cromwell's officers, by whom it was dismantled; since which it has gradually fallen to ruin. The present remains show it to have been a place of some strength, and consisted of the buildings before mentioned, and an inner and outer ballium, with the several offices of a large Castle, all surrounded by a deep fosse, supplied from an adjoining stream. The walls of the ballium are in some instances completely overthrown,



and lie in large masses on the ground; but where they are in any kind of preservation, they are pierced with large square loop-holes that would readily have suited the small artillery of the times. The castle and adjoining property belong to the Mountgarret branch of the house of Butler, whose patrimony it has been since the death of Pierre Earl of Ormonde and Ossory, A.D. 1539. Adjoining Balleen are the ruins of the parochial church of Sheffin. J. L.

ROMANCE OF IRISH HISTORY.

THE EARL'S PASS.

Dressed in the soiled and tattered garments of a way-worn wanderer, Dermot Mac Murrough, the deposed king of Leinster, presented himself before the warlike Henry the Second, in the imperial tent on the plains of Aquitain. Prostrating himself at the feet of the English monarch, he pleaded the cause of his grievances so effectually, that Henry, struck by the recital and his wretched appearance, offered on the instant to aid him in the recovery of his kingdom. We have nothing to do with considering whether Henry's frankness to the exiled chief was the result of calculating policy or spontaneous humanity; our business is with facts and romance, not with speculation. By reason of his wars with France the English king could not personally assist Mac Murrough, but, by letters patent, he authorized his subjects to carry his resolutions into effect. With such a permission, the Irish chief soon succeeded in engaging many Norman knights and adventurers in his quarrel, and enlisting them in his service. Amongst the rest, he prevailed upon the daring and powerful Baron De Clare, Earl of Chepstow, to second

his cause by the promise of his daughter Eva in marriage, and the reversion of his kingdom of Leinster. This Norman baron was a man of fierce passions and indomitable courage; he was possessed of immense strength, from whence came his well-known title of Strongbow; and having been by profuse extravagance rendered desperate in his fortunes, he was consequently the fittest leader that could be chosen to forward and conduct so hazardous an expedition.

Having completed all the necessary arrangements, Dermot sailed for Ireland, where, in the Abbey of Ferns, he solaced himself through the winter in the company of the reverend churchmen, with whom, doubtless for efficient reasons, he was a favourite. In the May following (A.D. 1170) he was cheered in his retirement by the gratifying announcement that an English fleet was hovering on the eastern coast; and in two days after he had the satisfaction of welcoming Robert Fitz-Stephen, Maurice Prendergast, Meyler Fitz-Henry, and Herve of Mountmaurice, to the coast of Wexford, and witnessing the disembarkation of the first British* battalions that ever made footing on Irish ground. This armament consisted of forty knights in complete armour, sixty men-at-arms in jacks, and four hundred choice archers and pikemen. Being joined by numbers of the native Irish, they quickly conquered that part of the country, and sat down in the town of Wexford, which had surrendered after four days'

* The descendants of those first British settlers still inhabit the Barony of Forth, and are distinguished from the absolute Irish by peculiar dialect and customs.

siege. Here they were soon after reinforced by Maurice Fitz Gerald* and Raymond le Gros, with a farther supply of troops.

In August of the following year, Strongbow, at the head of a numerous force, landed at Waterford, and, with the assistance of the other invaders, reduced the surrounding country; after which they fortified the town of Waterford, and spent many days in feasting and merriment, at one of which entertainments the proud Earl was first introduced to his betrothed bride, Eva, and saluted *Righ-Damhna* "heir" to the crown of Leinster. The nuptials of the earl and the fair Eva were solemnized with all the parade and pomp which the times and circumstances allowed of. The abbot of Ferns performed the ceremony; and the delighted Mac Murrough gave away his daughter, rejoicing in his heart at an alliance that promised him prosperity for the rest of his days, and complete triumph over his turbulent rivals.

At the banquet, profuse hospitality prevailed: the rich wines of France displayed their purple vintage, and the more fiery spirit of Ireland did its office: healths were pledged, in carved chalices, to the "strong in beauty and in arms:" the dance proceeded; the native bards poured forth their warmest floods of melody, relieved occasionally by the more brilliant, but less enchanting, performances of two Norman jongleurs who had followed in the English train: every tongue yielded words of joy, and every eye sparkled with animation. Amidst this scene of universal hilarity, one alone seemed to disregard the surrounding mirth—one face alone seemed overshadowed with gloom. The proud De Clare turned even from the confiding and smiling looks of his gentle bride—he appeared to disregard her winning advances, and a cloudy melancholy seemed setting its moody signet on his brow.

"Will not my lord walk down the room?" asked the loving Eva, as she placed her arm playfully upon his shoulder, and gazed with looks of affection on his face.

"I pray thee, pardon me, my lovely Eva," answered the earl, as he pressed her hand gently, and smiled languidly upon her. "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad, when my heart is full, and should be joyful—but it is only foolish custom. By thy leave, sweet bride, I will but take a turn or two in the night air, and all will be well—I will be back presently."

Tenderly embracing his bride, the earl murmured some words of love, and left the apartment. The night was beautifully fine; and the unbroken light of a full autumn moon invested the still ocean with a garment of glory, that seemed extending from the land, until it faded towards the horizon, and mingled with the violet tints of a cloudless sky.

"On such a night," soliloquized the Earl, as he trod the pebbly beach, "and on such an occasion, it is too wretched to be haunted by the familiar fiend of melancholy! Why am I thus persecuted? Why is my free spirit thus tortured? My father died without raid or violence—the blood of neither wife nor kindred is on my hands—opponents I have cloven to death in the tournament, and enemies I have slain in battle—these are but the chances of a warlike life—and yet I am continually the sport of tormenting and capricious demons! Ye powers that rule us, why is this? I have laboured by all the arts of arms to instil the spirit of a warrior into the bosom of my only son."

As the earl uttered the last word, a wild cry rang through the air, and then died away in a dismal cadence, like the wailing tone of an Eolian mournfully touched by a passing breeze. The earl was as brave as a lion; but the superstitions of his times had not failed to render his heart susceptible to supernatural terrors. He who had often borne unmoved the bloodiest brunt of battle, now quailed and trembled before what seemed to be nothing more than an airy sound. Summoning courage, however, he drew his sword, and strode towards the spot from whence the strange sounds had issued. He had just turned the angle of a projecting rock, when, to his utter astonishment, he discovered, partly shaded by the impend-

ing cliff, and partly revealed to the dazzling light of the moon, the form of a female dressed in flowing garments of white: her hands were clasped as if in an agony of grief, and her long black hair, streaming downwards in disorder, covered her face and shoulders.

"Who art thou," demanded the Earl stoutly, "that with such piteous moaning startlest the night, and disturbest holy reveries?"

Again the wild cry swelled and died away as before, and the maiden seemed to renew her show of sorrow. De Clare would have approached, but a wave of the figure's hand warned him back, and he felt, as it were, fascinated to the spot where he stood. Without moving her position in the slightest degree, or looking upwards, the maiden in a solemn and chaunt-like tone addressed herself thus to the amazed Earl:—

"De Clare—De Clare—De Clare!—
Through the shadowy moonlight air,
Spirits thus their tidings bear—
Thy hand, that now is marble fair,
Will soon a crimson livery wear;
By father's hand a son shall bleed—
A rebel nature works the deed.
'The Earl's Pass' beware—beware—
De Clare—De Clare—De Clare!"

She ceased, and a third time the doleful cry filled the air. At that instant a cloud passed over the disk of the moon, veiling its light; and a mist enveloped the place where the figure sat, which, ascending, dissipated itself by degrees in fantastic tracery over the brow of the cliff. The earl looked, but the phantom had disappeared. For some moments he stood bewildered in doubt, like one who strives to recal to his mind the scattered atoms of some fearful vision. At length he persuaded himself that he had not been dreaming—but his thoughts rolled in chaotic confusion. Vainly he tried to discover the object of so strange a visitation, and the ominous import of its warning was equally beyond his conjecture. With sunken eye and dejected step, he retraced his way to the banquet-room. The revellers were gone—the music and song had ceased—and a single lamp burned dimly in the lately gladsome hall. De Clare seized it, and, hurrying to his chamber, cast himself on his bridal couch, where tradition leaves him, and most unpardonably fails to inform us whether he slept well or ill.

Short was the time allowed for Strongbow to indulge either his melancholy or his love. Information had arrived that Roderick, the monarch of Ireland, was assembling a mighty army; which was shortly after confirmed by the news that he had encamped at the village of Clondalkin, near Dublin, with a force of thirty thousand men, and was determined to oppose the further progress of the invaders. These tidings were most welcome to the earl; who sought in the wild phrenzy of war a relief from the habitual melancholy that gnawed at his vitals, and came like a blight over his heart in peace. The army was quickly organized, and on the second day it rested in Idrone, in the county of Carlow, near a place called "The Earl's Pass," through which their road lay to Dublin. The name of this place recalled to Strongbow's mind his interview with the white phantom; but he laughed at her warning as a mere raving whimsy, when he saw the rear-guard of his army leaving the woody defile far behind; and uttering a jocund shout, he spurred his charger to the advance, without encountering the smallest incident that could lead him to suppose the spirit's rhyme any thing save idle mummery.

It is not part of our object to give a detailed account of Strongbow's various achievements in the field; we therefore pass by his victory over Roderick, and the subsequent conquests that made him master of Dublin. Here we shall leave him in the enjoyment of power and peace, while we request of our readers to go with us a twelve-month or so forward.

Beneath the dim twinkling of the stars, and the pale light of a crescent moon, a little skiff, urged by a single rower in the bow, was making its way up the river Liffey, towards that part of the city then called Ostmen's-town. In the stern was seated a fair-haired, noble-looking youth, who, by his dress and appearance, appeared to be Nor-

*. The ancestor of the noble family of the Geraldines, whose lineal representative is the present Duke of Leinster.

man-English. His limbs were moulded in perfect symmetry, well set off by his scrupulously-cut clothes. His face bore the impress of manly beauty; and from beneath his small cap, surmounted by a single heron's feather, his light-coloured locks fell in ringlets down his back. In his hands he held a small viol, after the fashion of the Norman trouveres, which ever and anon he touched with peculiar grace, swelling its music with a voice at once strong and harmonious. He seemed to have been well versed in *la gaie science*; and, doubtless, to use the words of old Pierre St. Cloud—

"Full many a dainty tale he knew—

A goodly Breton lay to you
Could tell: of Melin, Noton, too,
Or Arthur brave, or Tristram bold,
Of Charpel, of St. Brandon old."

"Speed to the oar, good William," quoth the youth, "and if thou bearest me well, the spotted ger-falcon shall be thine."

"That I will, master mine," answered the man; and tugged with new vigour at the oar.

"Canst thou see any light, William?"

"Ay, my lord, there is a light flame dancing on the ripple of the river above the Grey Friars."

"By the blessed rood!" cried the youth, in ecstasy, "that is her signal, sure enough! Speed—speed, for my favour."

The rower pulled lustily; and in a few moments the little skiff came to a landing-place leading to a rudely built tower, from the casement of which, facing the river, a small lamp shed a glimmering light, that flashed on the volatile current below.

"Heaven be blessed," cried the youth, "my beautiful Agatha has not forgotten her vigil of love!"

"And her father, the rough Harold," said the boatman, "sleeps, as is his wont, so soundly, that the blast of a Norman trumpet, or a wild Irish hilloo, would fail to wake him."

"In good sooth, the maiden deserves something for her pains. I would that I had hand and voice practised enough to make a ditty pleasing to her; and yet, in the courtly bowers of Normandy fair ladies have been charmed with my songs, and English dames have owned the sweetness of my viol. I will essay a trifle."

He played a soft prelude, and sung the following:—

"To yon casement, noble youth,
As unto your death you go:
She above hath little ruth—
Cross-bow, arbalest, in sooth,
Shoot not deadlier bolts below.
When the lattice open flies,
Vain is all your hope and care;
Then, oh then, her radiant eyes
Take thee captive by surprise—
Bondage sure awaits thee there.
Wounds in battle nought avail—
Leech may cure the cut of steel;
But if once her eyes assail,
Art and skill of mankind fail—
That wound can never heal.
Maiden, mine in pity see—
My wound—yet I endure it!
Pride not in thy cruelty!
Balm of love, oh, yield to me,
For that alone can cure it!"

As he ceased, the casement in the little tower opened, and the face of a young and beautiful female peered out cautiously.

"Gilbert," she said in a kind of loud whisper.

"It is thine own, thy devoted Gilbert!" cried the enraptured youth, as he sprang on land, and in an instant was standing beside the object of his affection, at the postern of the tower.

"I have to thank thee for thy pretty chanson, good Gilbert," said the artless girl.

"I would it were more worthy of thee, sweet Agatha, or that I could command time to give thee one of our prettiest Norman lays."

"Time, dear Gilbert? It is not yet eleven o'clock, and my father sleeps."

"And my father," said Gilbert, sorrowfully, "has desired my attendance on him at midnight; this sometime indolent life has rendered him again the subject of those fits of moody madness which, you may remember, I have often told you, prey so terribly upon him."

At this unwelcome piece of intelligence, the innocent girl hung down her head; and her long raven locks, clustering round her face, concealed from her lover the tears that trickled in silence down her peachy cheek. She felt at that moment as if the link which bound her to happiness had suddenly snapped, and, with it, had unnerved her heart-strings. Gilbert perceived her emotion; and, with the most soothing endearments, endeavoured to persuade her that there were no grounds for her sorrow.

"Cheer up, dear, dear Agatha," said he, gently pressing her to his bosom; "I would not, for my knighthood, that one tear of thine should flow to dim the lustre of thy bright eyes. I have good news for thee, if thou wilt hear it."

The gentle girl raised her head, and looked enquiringly at her lover; while a slight dimple on either cheek showed that she was now smiling at her own apprehensions.

"I have good news, Agatha," continued Gilbert: "what thinkest thou that Friar Egbert hath consented to wed us; aye, and to-morrow night, with thy leave, sweetheart, we shall meet at his little oratory; and, in half an hour after, laugh at love's chances, and defy the world to divide us." While he spoke, his eyes flashed in joyful anticipation of the happy moment when he should call all he held dearest on earth his own. He spoke, and his entire soul went with his speech, of future days of happiness and glory—of halcyon pleasures and unceasing delights. His fervid eloquence prevailed; and his pulse throbbed with intense rapture as he caught her silver accents murmuring consent to his proposal. One warm embrace told the happiness of the lovers, and they parted.

The next morning, at daybreak, a single horseman, covered with dust and foam, galloped past the sentry, and dashed into the court-yard of Strongbow's dwelling, calling loudly, "To arms, to arms!" He delivered a paper to Strongbow; which the earl had no sooner read, than he gave a shout, and commanded his trumpet to sound. In a few minutes, all was bustle and confusion in the different quarters of the town: the armourers were busy with their hammers, knights were mounting their barbed steeds, men-at-arms were readying their pikes and axes, and the bowmen were filling their quivers with the longest shafts. The dauntless earl was marshalling his forces, as they arrived in companies, on the gentle declivity that rose to the mound where Castle-street now stands. "The brave Fitzstephens," cried he, addressing his soldiers, "is defeated in Wexford; and his enemies have driven him into the mountain fastnesses of that country, where he must perish if he is not succoured. He hath let me know this, and calls upon us to march to his rescue: therefore, I cry, to the rescue!" The soldiers rent the air with shouts of "De Clare to the rescue." The earl turned round, and sharply enquired for his son, of Nichol, a warlike monk, who had assumed the equipments of a mounted archer. "Look where he comes," replied the monk; and presently Gilbert De Clare, in whom our readers will recognise the serenading lover, dressed in a handsome suit of armour, and nodding plume, spurred his white roan up to his father's side.

"We are for Wexford, Gilbert," said the earl, "where we shall have sore rubbers, I suspect."

"Indeed, Sir," replied Gilbert, "I am sorry that you are taken thus suddenly from us; but, doubt not, I shall keep a watchful guard in your absence."

"Absence!" cried the earl, frowning: "thou shalt go with us. Yes," he continued, raising his gauntleted hand to heaven; "yes, by the sword of Norman William, I have sworn that thou shalt try thy mettle in a full field, ere the beard sprouts on thy chin. Therefore, forward!—soldiers, forward!"

This announcement and determination came like a thunder-clap on poor Gilbert: his fondly-cherished hopes were, at a word, shattered to the ground. His cheeks blanched with the thought that he might possibly lose his beloved Agatha; and he fain would have expostulated

with the harsh resolve that tore him from her arms, but that he knew his father's fierce and unbending temper, now rendered more so by the prospect of blood and battle.

With a sorrowful heart, he took his place in the rear of the advancing ranks, and brooded in silence over his misery. Nor was he selfish in his feelings: he trembled when he thought of Agatha, and the terrible pangs she should endure when she learned that he was exposed to all the perils of a wild and barbarous warfare; and how she should upbraid him with neglecting to send her some token by which she might still hope for a continuance of his constancy. He pictured her abandoned to grief, weary with watching and weeping in the solitude of her chamber, with none to pour the words of comfort into her ear, and to assuage her sorrows. In the bitterness of his heart, he cursed the fate that made him noble, and compelled him to support, by deeds of hardy valour, the adventitious honour of knighthood. He recoiled from the scenes of woe his alarmed soul depicted; and, after devising and giving up a thousand plans of relief, he came to the desperate resolution of risking honour, fame, and manhood, by returning to Dublin. Filled with this unfortunate idea, he watched every opportunity to escape. At length one offered itself. About noon, the army had, by winding paths, passed an extensive bog, and were entering the intricate mazes of an oak forest, when Gilbert, on the pretence of recalling stragglers, rode back to the extreme rear, where he busied himself bringing up the scattered soldiers into the line of march. No sooner, however, was the gleam of the last helmet lost in the dark umbrage of the forest, than he turned his horse's head, and made for Dublin, with as much speed as his jaded charger could bear him. As the shades of evening fell, he entered the dusky city: and it is scarcely necessary to say, that, on that night, at the appointed hour, Gilbert De Clare and the beautiful Agatha became one in holy wedlock.

In the mean time, Gilbert was not missed on the march; and the army continued its course uninterruptedly until it drew near "The Earl's Pass," already mentioned. Here were found many traces of the enemy; such as the smoking embers of half-extinguished fires, and large trees hewn down and laid across the path, to intercept the march. Loud hilloos were heard; and numbers of Irish appeared on the hills, hovering about the flanks of the army. Strongbow took precautionary measures to ensure himself against surprise; and, having overcome the difficulties on the road, pushed forward. The Irish clans, however, were increasing their numbers every moment, and seemed, by their movements, as if they were concentrating their strength with a view to stop the further progress of the earl's army. Presently a wild shout was raised; and a ferocious-looking chieftain named O'Ryan, with a numerous force, appeared in front, and commenced an attack by letting fly a shower of arrows and stones. In an instant the engagement was general; and Strongbow's soldiers were assailed on all sides with such fury, that the English were driven back ere they could well recover the first panic of surprise. The tremendous bravery of their leader, however, inspired them with courage; and they rallied with irresistible strength: every long shaft of the English archers told with deadly aim, while the arrows of the Irish fell harmless from the mailed breasts of their adversaries. Still the Irish were far more numerous than the English; and they were bidding fair to win the day, when an arrow from the bow of Nichol, the monk, pierced the brain of the Irish chief, who instantly dropped dead. This event decided the fate of the day: the Irish, dismayed at the death of their leader, fled in the utmost confusion, and were pursued by the English with considerable slaughter. The battle lasted till dark, when the army rested for the night in the defiles of "The Earl's Pass."

As the morning dawned, the earl was pacing the green spot in front of his rude tent; his doublet unbraced, and a cap drawn far over his forehead. The usual savage gloom sat on his brow. "Eustace!" he called aloud; and his favourite squire was promptly in attendance.

"Eustace, heard'st thou aught since of my son?"

"No, my Lord."

"Think'st thou he fled to Dublin?"

"So many gallant knights have avowed."

"Fled—fled just before the battle, saidst thou?"

"Even so, my Lord."

"Eustace," said the earl, in a subdued but determined tone of voice, "send a herald to Dublin, on the instant, and let him proclaim Gilbert De Clare, son to the earl of Chepstow, a traitor to his king, and a recreant knight: and see that such a sum be set upon his head as shall induce the avaricious citizens to deliver him up to justice; and such penalties appended to harbouring him, as shall make their fingers ache to catch him. Eustace, I charge thee, as thou valuest thy life, see that my commands are put in force to the letter."

As the earl spoke, he clenched his hands, and bit his nether lip so violently, that the squire, fearing personal harm might be the effect of further delay, vanished, without a murmur, to do his moody master's bidding.

The earl retired to his tent, where he sat a long time, buried in profound melancholy: his thoughts were of his son. Brave himself, he abhorred cowardice in others as an unpardonable vice; and (as he deemed) the ignominious flight of his son, on the eve of battle, called on him to make a terrible example for the general good. At the expense of parental feelings, of his peace, and perhaps of his popularity, he determined to sacrifice his son. With such bloody reflections as these did the earl fill up his otherwise vacant thoughts; and was about deliberating as to the mode of his child's execution, when a loud huzza from the soldiery called him to his feet. A horse at full speed stopped suddenly at the tent; a horseman leaped from the saddle, rushed into the tent, and Gilbert De Clare was kneeling at the feet of his father.

"Joy, joy!" exclaimed the almost breathless youth; "joy to thy victory, most noble father."

"Coward!" roared the earl, quivering with rage, "darest thou mock me by naming my victory—me whom thou hast disgraced for ever by thy rank cowardice?"

"I am no coward, my lord," replied Gilbert, standing up proudly, and repelling the charge as well by gesture as by words.

"Thou liest, traitor—slave—scandalous coward," continued the earl, swelling with rage as he spoke. "The blood of the Norman De Clare no more flows in thy veins than does the noble spirit of the falcon inhabit the body of the mousing owl. 'Coward!'—and he struck the youth across the face with his scabbard.

"By St. Mary, a blow!" cried Gilbert, as instinctively he laid his hand on his dagger.

"Traitor!" cried the earl, "wouldst thou add parricide to thy cowardice?" and, losing all possession of himself in the whirlwind of his passion, he drew his sword, and buried it to the hilt in the bosom of his son.

The ill-fated young man fell, and expired without a groan; and at that instant the fearful cry that had first startled the earl on the night of his nuptials, wailed through the tent.

The earl's passion passed away as suddenly as it had been kindled; and when he saw before him the stiffening and gory body of his only son, he tore his beard in a frenzy of grief, cast himself on the corpse, and gave way to the most violent, but, alas! unavailing flood of lamentations. When his attendants entered, and beheld the melancholy spectacle, it was with the utmost difficulty they could remove the earl from the cold remains of his murdered son. The body was sent to Dublin, where it was interred in Christ's Church; and the now heart-broken earl moved towards Wexford no longer a sceptic in the prophetic knowledge of the spirit that had foretold the bloody tragedy of "THE EARL'S PASS."

Reader, on the south side of the great aisle of Christ's cathedral lies the rude tomb of Strongbow and his son, on which was formerly the following epitaph, probably the work of some enemy, to perpetuate the memory of the unfortunate event it calls to mind:—

"Nate ingrate, mihi pugnantia terga dedisti
Non mihi, sed Genti, Regno quoque terga dedisti."